



Children First
for Oregon

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CONTACT: Regan Gray
Policy Director
(503)781-8251
regan@cffo.org

On Road to Higher Education, Oregon Foster Youth Get Help from Legislators

Portland, OR- Tuesday, June 14, 2011 The Oregon House of Representatives will vote on legislation tomorrow that will ensure Oregon's foster youth have the resources to obtain a college degree.

The bill, HB 3471, establishes a tuition waiver for foster youth at community colleges and public institutions of higher education. To qualify for the waiver, youth who have spent 12 months or more in foster care between the ages of 16 and 18 must pursue a post-secondary education within three years of graduating from high school.

Members of Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC), a program of Children First for Oregon, proposed the idea for the bill, and will be at the legislature for the vote tomorrow. OFYC is a group of current and former foster youth between 14-25 whose mission is to improve the Oregon foster care system through advocacy, activism, and leadership.

"This a great day for Oregon's foster youth. College can mean the difference between a life in poverty and a life as a productive member of the middle class, but it's often out of reach for foster youth," says Pamela Butler, Program Director for OFYC and Policy and Outreach Associate at Children First for Oregon. "Most young people have their parents to help them through the college process. For foster youth, the state has taken on the role of the parent. Like any responsible parent, Oregon will now provide the support foster youth need to get an education."

Representatives Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) and Matt Wingard (R-Wilsonville) are chief co-sponsors of the bill illustrating that supporting foster youth is not a partisan issue.

The bill covers only what is leftover after use of existing financial aid resources. The Oregon University System estimates that the financial impact of the bill will be negligible. And yet this investment can have a big impact on the future success of Oregon's foster youth. Individuals with 2- and 4-year degrees make, on average, \$10,000-30,000 more per year than individuals with only a high school diploma. Currently, only 6% of foster care alumni earn a college degree, compared to 29% of the general population.

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If HB 3471 passes a vote by the entire legislature, Oregon will join sixteen other states that have already enacted tuition waivers to help foster youth get a degree. “Helping these kids get a college education is one of the best things we can do and it sends a clear message to the over 8,000 children and youth in foster care today: We, the citizens of Oregon, care about you and want you to be successful,” Butler says.

The Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) is comprised of young people between 14 and 25 years of age who have personal experience in the foster care system. OFYC’s mission is to improve the Oregon foster care system through advocacy, activism, and leadership. www.ORYouthconnection.org

Children First for Oregon is Oregon’s most respected nonprofit, nonpartisan child advocacy organization, committed to improving the lives of Oregon’s vulnerable children and their families. Our mission is to make long-term systemic change by advocating for policies and programs that keep children healthy and safe and strengthen families. www.cffo.org

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